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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN ROMANIA

REF: BUCHAREST 1314

¶1. (SBU) Summary: While Romania remains both a country of origin and transit point for trafficking in persons (TIP), its growing prosperity has increased the risk of a concomitant growth in internal trafficking. Interior Ministry statistics also suggest that trafficking for labor exploitation is growing relative to trafficking for sexual exploitation. There is increased cooperation between government agencies and NGOs on the prevention front, and more focus on improving coordination with neighboring states Moldova and Ukraine to help forestall the risks of Romania becoming a destination country for trafficking. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) TIP NGOs and other contacts have reported that the GOR's statistical reporting methodology has improved, and post has growing confidence in recent numbers. Statistics are gathered from fifteen regional centers, and are consolidated by the Romanian National Anti-Trafficking Agency (ANITP) located in the Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reform. However, ANITP realizes the number of victims identified likely does not capture the total number of victims of TIP-related crimes as many victims are reluctant to identify themselves, primarily because of the social stigma associated with prostitution. ANITP told Embassy that it is increasingly trying to bridge the "trust gap" so that victims feel more comfortable in identifying themselves to authorities.

¶3. (SBU) The Interior Ministry identified some 936 trafficking victims in the first half of 2007. All were Romanian nationals, including 150 minors. 528 victims were female, and 408 victims were male. With 425 victims, labor exploitation led the list of types of exploitation, followed by 406 sexual, 73 begging, and 32 other forms of exploitations. 105 of the identified TIP victims were victims of internal trafficking. Victims exploited for labor included 344 males; victims of sexual exploitation were almost all females (405 out of 406 victims). Out of the 425 victims exploited for labor, 200 were exploited in agriculture, 141 in construction, and 27 in the hotel industry. Victims, ages ranged from 13 to 68 years of age. 113 minors were trafficked for sexual exploitation, 15 for begging, 10 for forced labor, and 12 for child pornography.

¶4. (SBU) Italy and Spain remain traditional destination countries, with 225 and 209 victims trafficked, respectively. However, the Czech Republic has emerged as a new destination country, with 114 victims trafficked into the Czech Republic during the second half of the current year. The regions with the highest reported number of victims are: Teleorman (66), Mures (61), Arges (56), Constanta (53), Dolj (54), and Iasi

(45). Only 11 recorded victims were from Bucharest. Victim profiles suggest that labor exploitation victims are males from bi-parent families, 25 years of age, from both rural and urban areas, who are generally recruited through false job offers. They are frequently emotionally abused and burdened with debts. Most often they enter the destination country via bus. Victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are generally females from a single-parent family, between 18 and 25 years of age, originating from urban areas. They are mostly single, have a high school education, were recruited by a close family friend or acquaintance, and were emotionally vulnerable. Many female victims of sex trafficking may have had a limited understanding that may be working on the margins of the sex trade as barmaids or dancers, but do not realize the extent of the exploitation they will face. MOI data suggest a growing shift in victim numbers from sexual exploitation to forced labor. Factors explaining this shift include greater freedom of movement in the EU and a wider pool of job opportunities, or simply greater attention to the issue.

15. (SBU) The profile of traffickers varies. They include members of organized crime rings that may also specialize in other crimes including narcotics and weapons smuggling. However, according to MOI contacts and NGOs, most traffickers tend to come from small networks that maintain contact with similar small criminal groups in other countries. These groups tend to consist of five to six members, including recruiters, transporters, safe houses, and other links in the trafficking chain. Employment, travel and tourism agencies have also been implicated. There is no/no indication that Romanian government officials are involved in trafficking activities, or that traffickers use their profits to finance various armed groups, terror organizations or to bribe Romanian officials. According to a representative of the

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Southern European Cooperation Initiative (SECI), traffickers are increasingly in semi-consensual relationship with victims: to avoid detection and possible arrest and/or conviction, traffickers are increasingly allowing victims to keep their passports/travel documents, as well as some of their earnings.

16. (SBU) Funding of NGOs remains an issue of concern. Since Romania's accession to the European Union in January 2007, there has been a reduction in European non-reimbursible financing programs. Some TIP NGOs have had difficulties in carrying out their mission. In response, the ANITP set up a National Interest Program, aimed to provide grant money (over 200K USD) to cover necessary services provided to TIP victims. The program is funded until the end of 2007, and all indications point to renewed funding in 2008.

17. (SBU) Official national prevention efforts stress the theme of "Be careful: there's a price to pay!" These efforts are aimed at increasing awareness of potential victims and reducing their vulnerability to trafficking through provision of a national toll-free number where persons contemplating working abroad can call for counseling and assistance. In addition, this help line provides assistance to individuals already trapped in trafficking situations, who might be sequestered or otherwise might need assistance, or in providing counsel to individuals whose relatives or close friends might be victims. A parallel campaign focusing on forced labor is due to be launched next year. ANITP is also in the process of initiating an international toll-free number for Romanian victims trafficked outside of the country. At the regional level, prevention activities are being carried out in schools and local employment agencies, with the use of leaflets/brochures, educating individuals contemplating working abroad regarding possible risks and their legal rights. GOR efforts include a focus on improving law enforcement cooperation with neighboring states including Bulgaria, Moldova, and Ukraine, on the premise that--with growing prosperity--Romania may become a destination country

for victims from Moldova and Ukraine.

¶18. (SBU) Romanian investigation and prosecution efforts are improving. According to ANITP in the first six months of 2007, there were 641 investigations of trafficking offenders (compared to 618 in the same period of 2006). There was also an increase in the total number of convictions: 131 in the first six months of 2007 (compared to 187 during all of 2006). Observers point to improved interagency cooperation as a key factor in the increased number of convictions. Prosecutors from the Directorate for the Investigation of Organized Crime and Terrorism-related Offenses also cite increased information exchanges with counterparts in destination countries, including in 13 recent cases involving TIP. They note, too, that they received 44 requests of international assistance in criminal matters, including 18 requests successfully handled in cooperation with local police service, and 26 other requests were still in the courts. The same penalties apply in cases of both trafficking for sexual exploitation cases and for labor trafficking offenses. Sentences range from three years to 25 years, based on factors including: number of perpetrators, age of the victim, harm caused to the victim, and whether kidnapping, fraud, and/or violence or threats were employed.

¶19. (SBU) Cooperation between Romanian law enforcement and NGOs has been much improved through the ANITP, and there have been joint government-NGO efforts to provide proactive publicity aimed at potential victims. However, the leadership of the ANITP and MAI realize law enforcement efforts remain largely reactive in nature, with investigation taking place after trafficking has already been committed. To improve this, SECI contacts note there have been improved efforts recently to identify organizers and leaders of trafficking rings and to address the issue on a more systematic basis, including linked connections of entire organizations (e.g., the mastermind, pimps, transporters, etc.) Investigation techniques employed include greater use of informants, wiretaps, undercover agents, surveillance, and investigation of money and paper trails. SECI also cites improved transborder cooperation between and among source, transit, and destination countries in the region.

¶10. (SBU) The GOR appears to recognize the necessity to provide protection and social reintegration for TIP victims, and the need for a more seamless link between investigations and assistance. Recent practical experience has demonstrated that investigative outcomes were improved when assistance specialists with ANITP, NGOs, or local agencies were

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involved. The ANITP now has 15 regional centers with three staff members for each (an increase from the previous requirement for two staff members). These centers help analyze TIP trends at the local level, monitor the implementation of anti-trafficking plans, and evaluate shelter activity. The ANITP's National System for Monitoring and Assessment processes victims' personal data for identification and speedy referral to specialized support services, and cross-references data of TIP victims, including personal data, pre-trafficking period, recruitment and transportation, exploitation period, assistance period, and post-assistance period. This data management has helped improve the evaluation of the dynamics of TIP at a national level, and is increasingly integrated with information from law enforcement, regional TIP centers, NGOs, and medical services.

¶11. (SBU) Comment: One continuing weak point remains victim identification. The onus remains on the victim alone to identify himself/herself and to come to authorities for help. In response, ANITP has developed an identification project and referral norms to increase the number of victims identified and referred to specialized support services. National standards are also being developed for victim assistance services. Another promising area is in

international cooperation with Romanian authorities seeking to share "best practices" and to deal more effectively with the trans-national aspects of the issue. Ongoing partnerships include bilateral programs with the Dutch government for improving the quality of protection assistance and a Victim/Witness Coordination program initiated by this US Embassy (cited by the U.S. Department of Justice as a regional "best practice"). Romania also participates in a program to support the development of a transnational referral mechanisms for TIP victims in Southast Europe, developed by International Centre for Migration Policy Development with American financial support. The GOR also works with UNICEF, UNHCR, Agence Nationale Del l'Accueil des Etrangers et des Migrations (ANAEM) France, the International Organization For Migrartion, and the International Labor Organization. However, the phase-out of USG SEED-sponsored programs in Romania may adversely impact some of these efforts. Romanian civil society is starting to fill some of these gaps, including the participation of Red Cross Romania in campaigns to prevent child trafficking; Salvati Copiii,s (Save the Children) outreach to tourism industries and their work in developing a "code of conduct" for hotels and tourism industries. Caritas now provides anti-TIP and anti-drug information in schools, and AIDRom has focused on prevention and training. Finally, the Ambassador's recent positive discussion with the new Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church (reftel) also suggests another fruitful area for developing a "coalition of the willing" in the anti-TIP effort. End Comment.

TAPLIN